

**Remarks of
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at the
COMMERCIAL VEHICLE SAFETY ALLIANCE
ROADCHECK 2004 NEWS CONFERENCE
WEST MEMPHIS, ARKANSAS
MONDAY, JUNE 7, 2004**

On behalf of President Bush and Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I'm privileged today to join my distinguished colleagues to highlight this important event.

Safety Goal

Safety *is* our primary goal at the FMCSA, and safety is the top transportation priority of this Administration. In 2003 we lost more than 43,000 people on our nation's highways. Of that 43,000, nearly 5,000 deaths were related to commercial motor vehicles. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and NHTSA share a commitment to reducing the fatality rate in all motor vehicle crashes by 41 percent from 1996 to 2008.

This is especially critical as we look at our nation's growing economy. The U.S. transportation system annually carries more than 16.3 billion tons of freight — valued at over \$12 trillion. And, as the economy continues to take off, we project freight volume will increase by more than 50 percent in the next 20 years. So we need to prepare.

Importance of Inspections

This is the 17th year that US DOT has partnered with CVSA to focus on the year-round commercial vehicle and driver roadside inspection program. Roadcheck draws public attention to the continuous efforts of law enforcement and the truck and bus industries to save lives on North American highways.

This is vitally important to USDOT. A significant part of FMCSA's time and resources are dedicated to helping States maintain their inspection programs. Our agency estimates that from 1998 to 2000 roadside inspections and enforcement had very impressive results:

- They helped save more than 1,500 lives;
- They helped prevent nearly 25,000 injuries;
- And, they helped stop more than 36,000 crashes.

Today's event will show just what enforcement officials do to help ensure trucks and buses are safe to travel our roads, including taking unfit vehicles *off* the road.

National Tankcheck Project

An important part of this year's Roadcheck is the National Cargo Tankcheck, a critical activity of FMCSA's Hazardous Materials Program. The goal of Tankcheck is to reduce the risk of hazmat spills by identifying tank trucks that are not in compliance with Federal regulations.

FMCSA encourages all of its partners to join in this effort. We're working closely with hazmat carriers to ensure their drivers are aware of the special risks of operating tank trucks. These vehicles are safe when they are driven and maintained properly.

Yet safety goes beyond the carrier following basic regulations. It takes the complete package — properly maintained equipment, properly trained and physically alert drivers, and a management team committed to make sure employees come home safely to their families every single day.

Safety Belt Usage

I want to talk about another important safety issue for DOT — safety belts. In 2003, 58 percent of those killed in passenger vehicles were not wearing safety belts. This underscores the value of the need for states to adopt standard safety belt laws.

We're proud that we have raised the national safety belt usage rate to 79 percent — the highest level ever. However, a recent study by FMCSA showed that only 48 percent of truck and bus drivers buckle up.

So, last December, Secretary Mineta gathered with enforcement and trucking leaders to launch the broadest effort this country has ever seen to get truckers to wear their safety belts. And we kicked off the Memorial Day holiday and start of the summer travel season with a \$30 million *Click It or Ticket* campaign.

This has been a very successful program. Last year, *Click It or Ticket* resulted in a 4-percent nationwide increase in safety belt use. That's great news because it translates into about 1,000 lives saved. So, it's time for all drivers to buckle up.

Close

In closing, I again would like to thank and congratulate CVSA and the Arkansas Highway Police for hosting the 2004 Roadcheck kick-off event. Remember that working together, we can all improve safety, prevent crashes and save lives.